

# The Christian's Obligation

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** Romans 8:12-13

It is with great joy that once again in the providence of God we come to the ministry of his Word. Will you join me in taking your Bibles and turning to Paul's epistle to the Romans? We find ourselves now in verses 12 and 13 of chapter eight. And in this text we will learn more about the Christian's obligation which is the title of my discourse to you this morning.

Here Paul is going to move from exposition to exhortation. Given the mercies of God what is our responsibility? How do we crucify the old self and truly obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit?

Let me read the text for you. Romans eight beginning at verse 12.

So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.<sup>1</sup>

May I remind you that Paul has been talking about the marvelous realities of being justified, of believers being placed in Christ. We have been removed forever from the realm of condemnation, an amazing thought. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and empowered by him. We have a radically new nature.

Now, based upon our position in Christ, we are exhorted to live consistently with these staggering realities of our new nature. Remember we are new creatures in Christ, Paul has told us. The old things have passed away. Behold, the new things have come.

1 Corinthians 6:19 we are told that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you. Peter tells us, as well, that we have been given the divine nature of Christ. So everything is different now. We have life and power from the Spirit.

Verse 11.

“... the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead.”<sup>2</sup>

So now we must understand what it means to tap into the power source, to tap into the resources that we have. As Paul said in Philippians two verses 12 and 13. You remember that magnificent passage. We are told there to work out your salvation in fear and trembling. That is something that we must do. We are to aggressively and actively pursue obedience. But how thankful we are that we are not left unto ourselves to do that, because the rest of the verse goes on to say.

“...for it is God who is at work in you.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:12-13.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:11.

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So this is the dynamic that is going to be played out here in the text before us. May I remind you, as well, of Ephesians chapter two verse 10. For we are his what? Workmanship.

“...his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”<sup>4</sup>

So having described in many chapters now the character of the Christian, the new nature and all that goes with that, Paul now begins a section on practical application.

What I want to do this morning is look at three things. First we are going to explore what it means to be a debtor to the spirit rather than to the flesh. We are going to understand what Paul refers to when he speaks of this. And, secondly, we are going to examine just briefly a few mistaken views of sanctification and then finally we are going to examine six very practical ways the Bible will tell us how to put to death the deeds of the body, essential truths that, frankly, few Christians really know, few Christians really understand and even fewer tend to live.

So what does it mean to be a debtor to the spirit, not the flesh?

Notice verse 12. He says:

“So then, brethren...”<sup>5</sup>

In other words, in light of the glorious privileges that are ours he says we are under obligation not to the flesh to live according to the flesh. The term “obligation” could be translated debtor. We are not a debtor to the flesh.

Now, bear in mind, although the flesh which is our old sinful nature is an ever present reality in the life of the Christian and it will not be eradicated completely until glory, nevertheless we see here that we owe it nothing. We are not a debtor to it. We are not required to respond to its promptings. In fact, we see here that we are no longer to live according to the flesh. We are no longer to live under the domination of the old nature that ends to rear its ugly head from time to time.

We are no longer indebted to it so that we live out those selfish motives, those arrogant desires and purposes of our heart, those idolatrous affections all of the wicked lusts and violent thoughts and laziness and lack of devotion and filthy words, all the deeds of the flesh that Paul talks about in Galatians five. All that corruption that flows from the heart, that manifests itself through our bodies, we are no longer under its rule, under its obligation. We no longer have to listen to that. It no longer has a claim on us.

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<sup>3</sup> Philippians 2:13.

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 2:10.

<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:12.

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You will recall in Romans chapter seven verse 14 Paul said that we were once sold under sin. But what you must understand is now we have been delivered from the realm of tyranny, that realm of sin. So now we become servants to righteousness and we can ignore the demands of the flesh.

Think of it this way. The flesh is now a toothless tiger. It has been declawed. It has been crippled. Unless we choose to once again succumb to the fantasy of its former fierceness.

You see, dear friends, it is only when we break fellowship with the Holy Spirit that the old nature reasserts its fraudulent claim upon our lives. That is the emphasis that the apostle is helping us understand here. Now it is the Spirit that is in control. He has regenerated us spiritually. One day we will be resurrected physically by the power of the Spirit so we are under obligation to obey him, to constantly rely upon his power so that we can enjoy being free from the bondage of sin, free from that tyranny, the tyranny of the flesh.

So in verse 13 he says:

“...for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die.”<sup>6</sup>

Now here the apostle is speaking of the unregenerate man who remains in the dominion of the flesh. He is enslaved by his old nature. He is spiritually dead and unless he repents, he will continue to move inexorably towards the second death of an eternal hell. That is the horror of sin. That is where it leads. If you live according to your flesh, you are continuing to yield allegiance to the power of the sinful nature and that will drag you into its doom. But not so those who have been justified, those who have been declared righteous, who have the imputed righteousness of Christ, who have been born again, who, as Paul says in Romans 8:1 are now under no condemnation. So that is the contrast.

So he says, if you are living according to the flesh you must die, but if by the Spirit... that is, if you are living according to or under the influence of resident Holy Spirit he says you are putting to death the deeds of the body.

I like the old English word in the King James, mortify. You are mortifying that flesh which means to make something to die. You are mortifying the deeds of the body. It could be translated this way. The doings of the body, which is really the doings of the flesh that uses the body as its organ of wickedness. If you do that, he says, you will live. If you are living by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

And, of course, that is true, because of eternal life that is available only for those who are in Christ. We will, indeed, live eternally in his glory.

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<sup>6</sup> Romans 8:13.

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So we are debtors not to the flesh, but to the Spirit. Our joyful obligation is to submit to him the one who empowers us in this putting to death the deeds of the body which results in eternal life.

So to say it a little bit differently, we must learn what it means to decisively commit ourselves to living consistently with these great truths, to rely upon, shall we say, the active presence of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

Now with this wonderful privilege of the new nature of our justification comes responsibility. And this is a fascinating truth that we find in Scripture. It is amazing when you think about it. First we see that God gives the blessing. He gives us the blessing. He establishes the position that we have in him. He grants us all the power. He makes these wonderful promises. He gives us all of these provisions. Then after we have everything that we need to succeed he exhorts us to obedience. An amazing thing, isn't it? We are now in Christ. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Peter says in 2 Peter 1:3:

“...that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness.”<sup>7</sup>

Beloved, you must understand that God never asks us to do what we are unable to accomplish. He has given us the power. We have all the necessary resources. We do not need countless hours of therapy with Dr. Phil. We have got his Word, the resident Holy Spirit. So now we need to do what God commands us to do.

Now notice in verse 13 he is saying that if you are living by the Spirit, you are putting to death deeds of the body. It is interesting, grammatically, the original language this is in the present tense.

And this denotes that this action is going on right now. It is an action that will continue. It is an action that will be repeated. It is habitual.

You see, the habitual killing of sin will be the defining mark of a Christian because of the work of the Spirit that is within him. The person says he is a Christian and you don't see that happening, he has no legitimate claim to Christ.

Paul wants us to grasp this. He wants us to realize it. He wants us to understand these truths of who we are in Christ. He wants these truths to grip our souls. Therefore he begins this whole section of exhortation in verse 12 with, “So then...” It could be translated “therefore.” In light of all the things that I have been telling you about what has happened in your justification, with this indwelling Spirit within you. So then, in light of this, here is what you can do.

I am reminded of Jesus' prayer in John 17. He said:

“Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Peter 1:3.

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We have got to know the truth. That is what God uses to make us more conformed to the image of Christ.

I believe that one of the reasons why so many Christians live defeated lives is because they fail to realize the truth of who they are in Christ, that they are hidden in Christ, that their bodies have died to sin, that the Holy Spirit dwells within them. It is not some experience that you need to earnestly seek, that they are alive in the realm of the Spirit, not the flesh, that they are no longer debtors to the flesh, but to the Spirit.

So you don't have to pay attention to it anymore. You don't have to give your allegiance to the flesh when it prompts you to do those things that you know are dishonoring to the Lord, those things that have brought untold misery into your life and into my life and into the life of everybody that has ever existed.

Remember, the hymn we were singing, *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*, written back in the 1700s. I love that one refrain where it says:

Oh, to grace, how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be.  
Let that grace, Lords, like fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee.

Now because of all of this that God has done in us and through us, the Spirit is at work helping us to continue to do what Paul says here and put to death the deeds of the body.

Now don't think of sanctification as some kind of a 50-50 partnership here. Salvation is all of grace from beginning to end. But this process of mortifying or killing the deeds of the body does require our participation. However, by some means that we can't even fathom and some inscrutable operation of the Holy Spirit we see that he enables us to progressively conquer the sinfulness that is still latent within us.

Now this is part of what Paul said in Philippians two as I said earlier. We are to work out our salvation in fear and trembling. Yet it is God who is at work in us to accomplish all these things.

Now of a moment I want to digress to help you understand three mistaken views of sanctification because these come up in various ways in the Church and they have for many, many years.

The first mistaken view is that of Antinomianism. Antinomianism just means against the law. This view holds that since Christ has fully satisfied the demands of the law that the believer is therefore free to live however he wants, even wickedly if he chooses to. There is no reason to struggle with the tendency to sin since Christ has paid the penalty for all of our sins, every sin that we will ever commit.

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<sup>8</sup> John 17:17.

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I remember confronting a man that came to this church for a period of time, he and his wife, and his wife was a very seductive flirt. She dressed like a trollup and she openly admitted that she had fallen in love with another man within the church. Well, when I pulled the man aside and said we need to talk and I confronted him on these issues and you need to deal with his wife, being the Antinomian that he was he said something like this.

“Grace has covered all her sins. There is no condemnation because she is in Christ. So for us to focus on sin is to deny grace. I believe in total grace.”

Well, that is a blasphemous distortion of the truth.

In 1 John 1:6 we read that:

“If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”<sup>9</sup>

Paul commands us not to even associate with immoral people within the church, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, that whole section. We are to judge those, he says, who are within the church. He even goes on to say remove the wicked man from among yourselves and so forth.

So the reply to Antinomianism would be basically this. Indeed, we are delivered from the penalty of the law, but not from moral obligation to the moral principles embodied in the law.

We are called to live a life of holiness and godliness. If we are free to live however we wish, then Jesus' detailed description of how to deal with sin in Matthew 18 would beg for relevance as would many, many other passages of Scripture. Scripture is filled with exhortations telling us how to deal aggressively with our sin.

Remember Romans six verse 12.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.<sup>10</sup>

So I would humbly say that if you believe in total grace as that man put it, in reality what you mean is you believe in total pride, because that is not at all the grace that God describes in his Word. That is a perversion of it.

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<sup>9</sup> 1 John 1:6.

<sup>10</sup> Romans 6:12-13.

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A second mistaken view is that of Perfectionism. Sometimes it is called Eradicationism. And this view asserts, as you might well imagine, that a believer can come in this life to a place of total victory over sin. I can assure you that that has not happened in my life and you give me five minutes with you and I can prove it hasn't happened in yours either.

Therefore they believe that you can live a perfect life in this mortal body and so forth.

You see, they would insist that by an exercise of the will the sin nature can be completely eradicated subsequent to salvation, that in one single act of faith combined with a special baptism of the Holy Spirit a man can be instantaneously and entirely sanctified. It is a doctrine commonly known as entire sanctification. Perhaps you have heard of that.

For example in section 10 of the Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene that believes this, you would read as follows. Quote, "We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God subsequent to regeneration by which believers are made free from original sin or depravity and brought into a state of entire devotion to God and the holy obedience of love made perfect. It is wrought by the baptism with the Holy Spirit and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin and the abiding indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit empowering the believer for life and service."

It goes on to say, "This experience is also known by various terms representing its different phases such as, quote, Christian perfection or, quote, perfect love or, quote, heart purity or, quote, the baptism with the Holy Spirit or even the fullness of blessing and Christian holiness," end quote.

Sometimes this position is referred to as the holiness movement. It has chiefly been associated with the followers of John Wesley. It is common in classic Methodism and other groups associated with Wesley, groups like the Salvation Army, for example. You see it in Pentecostalism, many of the charismatics in that movement. Of course it was also held by the heretic Charles Finney who was the inventor of emotional manipulation and anxious benches and altar calls and all of these types of things.

But this view really underestimates the moral law and the character of God. And it overestimates the human will.

1 John one verse eight we read:

"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us."<sup>11</sup>

Certainly Paul's testimony of his own struggle with sin in Romans seven is enough to destroy such a heresy. In Philippians three you will recall that Paul there confessed even after he had been an apostle for many years that he still struggled with his sin. In verse 12 we read:

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<sup>11</sup> 1 John 1:8.

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“Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”<sup>12</sup>

He said:

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

A third and final errant view of sanctification is that of Legalism. This is really an attitude that says that Christian growth and holiness is accompanied by rigid conformity to a vast array of external rules. The emphasis is wholly upon conformity to those specific rules.

You see, Legalism really reveres God's order. God tells us: Do this because you are holy. But Legalism says: I am holy because I do these certain things. It is a perversion of the truth.

Now, you must understand that the error here is not in having external objective rules and regulations as long as they are truly biblical and not merely your personal preference that you have somehow elevated to a status of divine fiat as is typically the case. And then we try to impose those things on other people. That is something that Paul will later on condemn vehemently in Romans 14 describing it as weak faith and so on.

But the error of Legalism is in believing that conformity to these rules is the root of holiness rather than the fruit of holiness. You see the difference. And therefore we must understand that the basis of sanctification, the source of holiness is not conformity to certain rules, but rather it is the supernatural work of the indwelling Spirit of God that helps us put to death the deeds of the body.

And that is precisely Paul's point.

Verse 13. He is saying here if you are living by the Spirit, you are putting to death the deeds of the body. Again, present tense. This is an action. This habitual killing of sin is going on right now. And it will continue because of the work of the Spirit that empowers us to do so.

No true Christian will habitually live in sin. We are just not going to see that. If you do see that, you are not a true believer, because we are seeing here that it is the Spirit that is going to be putting to death the deeds of the body. A true Christian will walk according to the Spirit. Remember, we studied that in verse five I believe last week. His mind will

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<sup>12</sup> Philippians 3:12.

<sup>13</sup> Philippians 3:13-14.



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dwell on the things of the Spirit referring to the depths of God revealed in Scripture, 1 Corinthians 2:7-10 and so forth.

If a man professes that he is a Christian, but all of these things are noticeably absent, then he is self deceived. Again, he has no legitimate claim to Christ. And, sadly, we see this all the time. We see Christians who are Christian in name only. They profess Christ, but they really don't possess Christ. There is no hungering and thirsting for righteousness, no mourning over their sin, no concern for repentance, no commitment to worship, no commitment to serving within the church, no appetite for the Word, no holy affections, no measurable spiritual growth, just a bunch of culturally acceptable religious externals that in their mind convinces them that they are, indeed, a Christian and hopefully convinces everybody else around them of the same.

Now let's examine Paul's exhortation here with respect to the putting to death of the deeds of the body. What kinds of things would this include in our life? And I wish to draw your attention to six very practical ways to put to death the deeds of the body. That is not to say that there aren't many more. But within the scope of our time today, I think I could give you six that are fundamental.

Number one, you must, dear Christian, understand who you are in Christ. This is why Paul began this section as I told you earlier. He began this section of exhortation with the words, "So then, brethren..." In light of all of the things that has happened to you by God's grace, the indwelling power of the Spirit and so forth, you need to know these things. You must, if I can put it this way, understand who you are positionally so you can function practically the way God would have you function.

Yes, we have an obligation to put to death the deeds of the body. But we can't do it in our power. We have the built in power source, however, and that is of the Holy Spirit.

May I remind you that Paul exhorted the saints in the Colosse in the same way. You will recall in Colossians three beginning in verse one he begins by saying:

If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.<sup>14</sup>

In verse five he says:

"Therefore..."

Once, again, in light of these things. Make sure you know these things now.

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<sup>14</sup> Colossians 3:1-3.

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“Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.”<sup>15</sup>

He gives you a list here, a sampling.

Verse eight he says:

But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.<sup>16</sup>

So, beloved, you must begin by understanding these magnificent provisions that had been granted to you by our glorious Redeemer. Realize these things are true.

“...walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”<sup>17</sup>

Ephesians 4:1.

You will recall when we studied Romans six in order to really gain victory over remaining sin that is within us, that we must do three things. Given the truth about our radically new nature, we have to know it in our mind, affirm it in our heart and live it by our will.

So this is where you must begin. You see, you can't live what you don't know. If I can give you an example, when David picked up the sling and went out to confront Goliath, his confidence was not in the sling, but in the Lord of hosts. He knew the Lord of hosts. He knew what God had done. He knew that the power was there. And so he was going to live consistently with it.

It is tragic to see believers who are not ill equipped. We have got all we need, but we seem to be ignorant of the power source that we have. We fail to internalize the reality of the indwelling Spirit and we tend to also under estimate the power of the Goliath of sin that we need to face.

But you must know these things, know who you are in Christ if you ever expect to kill those sins which would seem invincible.

So Paul is telling us here even in this text to exercise that power that is in us, tap into it and watch what God will do.

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<sup>15</sup> Colossians 3:5.

<sup>16</sup> Colossians 3:8-10.

<sup>17</sup> Ephesians 4:1.

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A second way to kill sin, search your heart. Because sin is so deceptive and because the flesh is so biased in its favor, we seldom recognize sin in our life. When somebody confronts us with it, we get all upset. But in truth the vast majority of our sin is buried under layers and layers of self deception and pride and ignorance and so forth. In fact, in Ephesians 4:22 Paul referred to this as part of, quote:

“... the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit.”<sup>18</sup>

That really describes it. And what little we do see we typically never deal with, because, after all, we can justify it and we can rationalize it and I can't believe you would say that about me because, you know, and here we go. And that is typically how we function.

So we must begin here by crying out for spiritual discernment. Remember the prophet Haggai chapter one verse five and also in verse seven. God speaks to him and says, “Consider your ways.”

That is what we have to do. Isn't it amazing how we can spot a speck in our brother's eye from 1000 yards. And we can't see the logs protruding from our own. We need help, don't we? We need serious help. We need supernatural help.

Solomon prayed for the people of Israel in 1 Kings 8:38 that:

“...each knowing the affliction of his own heart.”<sup>19</sup>

We see this, as well, in Psalm 26 verse two. It was David's habit to cry out to the Lord:

“Examine me, O LORD, and try me; Test my mind and my heart.”<sup>20</sup>

And in Psalm 139 verse 23 he said:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me.”<sup>21</sup>

Beloved, if I can put it to you as bluntly, but as kindly as I know how, you must learn to be suspect of your own spirituality. And then come before the Lord and ask him to expose to those ways that your life is dishonoring to him, those ways that are subjecting you to divine chastening and you may not even fully realize it.

In fact Peter calls us in 1 Peter 4:7 to:

“...be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ephesians 4:22.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Kings 8:38.

<sup>20</sup> Psalm 26:2.

<sup>21</sup> Psalm 139:23-24.

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So we must search our heart.

A third way to go to battle against sin is to literally do that, go to war against sin.

I want you to notice something here. The Holy Spirit is not helping us to merely restrain our sin. He is not telling us that he is going to kind of help us keep a lid on it. Nowhere do you read that somehow we are told, "Hey, don't sweat the small stuff. Just deal with the big ones."

No, that is not what he says. He exhorts us to put to death the deeds of the body. If I can put it a little bit differently, you hunt it down and you kill it. That is what you do in war.

As I was meditating upon this my mind immediately went to a time when I was camping in Montana and I noticed the back end of a rattlesnake go into my tent. And guess what I did at that moment? I declared jihad on that snake. It was the absolute consuming passion of my life to make sure that it died of lead poisoning as quickly as possible. And it did. Friends, that is what we need to do with our sin. When we see it, hunt it down and kill it, because it is trying to kill you. It will destroy you. Don't make it your pet.

Sins of lust and evil desires are so exceedingly dangerous, remember what Jesus warns in Matthew five beginning in verse 29. He says:

And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell.<sup>23</sup>

You see, here the Lord is using graphic hyperbole to basically say there is no action too great when it comes to dealing with sin. There is no price too high to pay when it comes to dealing with your gossip, your anger, your pornography, your slander, your resentment of the authority that God has placed over you, your laziness, your greed, your financial stupidity, whatever it is. Hunt it down and kill it.

Dear Christian, sin cannot be domesticated. It must be exterminated.

Spurgeon once said that many times Christians keep their sin in a bottle and hide it in their coat and every now and then they take out the bottle, they open up the lid, they take out their sin and they play with it. And then they put it back in and hide it where no one can see.

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<sup>22</sup> 1 Peter 4:7.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 5:29-30.

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The problem is, he said, that every time we take out that sin it gets a little bit bigger and eventually a day will come when you can't get it back in the bottle. You have got to deal with it aggressively. And, beloved, when you see it, you have got to confess it specifically and then you go to war against it. It is your enemy. It is causing you to forfeit blessing in your life. It is ruining your family. It is even placing you in the pathway of divine chastening, bringing untold misery into your life.

I think of so many men that I have dealt with over the years and I can think of a number even today, men who have failed to shepherd their families as they should. They have violated what God has told them to do. They have never gone to war against that wickedness. And, eventually their marriage begins to suffer, their children begin to go astray and the metastasizing corruption of sin begins to eat away at that family... And how many of us could finish the rest of the story?

You have got to go to war against your sin because it is a war against you.

Number four, you have got to understand what it means to walk by the Spirit.

God has promised in Galatians 5:16 that if we walk by the Spirit we will not carry out the desire of the flesh. Walk is a very interesting metaphor. It is the idea of deliberately choosing to regulate your life according to the Spirit. It is the idea of, shall we say, surrendering your life completely to his will as he has revealed himself in Scripture, to rely upon his power. Otherwise, the flesh will reassert its authority over you.

Now, it is interesting. When we walk obediently with him, we are not only going to have victory over the flesh, but later on he says that we will bear the fruit of the Spirit, the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control.

Now I want you to notice the contrast of metaphors, that of walk versus fruit. Walking requires volition, something you must choose to do. But fruit requires no volition. It happens automatically. You never seen grapes grunting to somehow produce themselves on a vine. It is just part of it. And that is what is going to happen with the fruit of the Spirit.

And so here we discover a very important principle in our fight against sin and that is simply this. When we choose to do our part by obediently walking, the Holy Spirit does his part and produces the fruit. The deeds of the flesh get pushed aside and the fruit begins to take it over.

Again, that concept of working out your salvation and yet it is God who is at work in you. You see that dynamic there as well.

And a central way that we can walk by the Spirit and this would be my fifth point to you with respect to killing sin in your life we must crave the Word. You must crave the Word.

# The Christian's Obligation

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** Romans 8:12-13

Remember in 1 Peter two and verse two Peter talks how we should be like new born infants that long for mother's life sustaining milk, what Peter called the pure milk of the Word so:

“... that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.”<sup>24</sup>

Now obviously if a man has no appetite for the Word of God, he will not grow. And, frankly, that is a condition that in most cases indicates that that individual is unregenerate. Only a dead baby would not want milk, right?

You see, Scripture is to sin what weed killer is to weeds. Can you think of it that way? A little Round Up which is one of my favorite tools in my garden as I hate doing yard work. I love Round UP. And it is interesting how just a little dose will weaken those weeds and a larger dose will kill them all together.

And, like, various weeds in the garden, so, too, there are different sizes and kinds of sins in our life that require different applications of the Word.

But ultimately sin cannot grow in a garden that is saturated with the Word of God. Not only will the wild plants of sin wither up and die, but also they will find no place to take root among the strong plants of righteousness that the Spirit of God is causing to grow within the garden of your heart.

The psalmist said, Psalm 119:11:

“Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee.”<sup>25</sup>

And in Psalm one verse two you will remember the psalmist reminds of those whose:

“...delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.”<sup>26</sup>

He says that:

“... he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season, And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.”<sup>27</sup>

It is an amazing thing, isn't it? The more a believer submits to the truths of Scripture, the more he will develop an increased appetite of the same. It is a fascinating thing. The more we taste of the heavenly fruit, the more we crave it. And by divine enablement, we grow

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<sup>24</sup> 2 Peter 2:2.

<sup>25</sup> Psalm 119:11.

<sup>26</sup> Psalm 1:2.

<sup>27</sup> Psalm 1:3.

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in Christian maturity, we grow in the grace and the knowledge of Christ and we find ourselves longing for the Word more and more.

That is why when I see a person that really doesn't care that much for the teaching of the word, I know that there is a serious spiritual problem there.

In Romans 12:2 he is going to describe to us how that there is a spiritual metamorphosis. There is a gradual transformation that occurs through the renewing of the mind. We are transformed by the renewing of our mind. Measurable spiritual growth will occur. And others are going to see it.

The blessed fruit that is the result of being saturated by the Word of God is described in marvelous detail in Paul's words to the Colossians. You remember that passage in chapter three verse 12.

There he says, "So..." And, again, he reminds them who they are in Christ.

"And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved..."<sup>28</sup>

All right, there, again, that is where you have got to begin.

Here is what I want you to do:

...put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.<sup>29</sup>

Then he summarizes it with this great truth.

"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you."<sup>30</sup>

That is the point here. And that is not going to happen if you don't crave the Word. But the more you read it, the more you study it, the more you meditate upon it, the more you apply it to your life, the more you are going to crave it. And that word will give you such clear direction. It is an amazing thing.

Again, there are so many passages that describe the things that we are to do.

People ask me at times, "Well, I really want to know God's will for my life."

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<sup>28</sup> Colossians 3:12.

<sup>29</sup> Colossians 3:12-15.

<sup>30</sup> Colossians 3:16

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And my goodness, you know, don't you have a Bible? I mean, there is thousands of passages. Let me give you a few. By the power of the Spirit, he says, don't walk in the counsel of the wicked. Ok, that is not hard to figure out. Make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lust. Flee from immorality. Buffet your body and make it your slave. Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. Discipline yourself for the sake of godliness. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness. And on and on it goes.

You see, friends, when you crave the Word, when you know it and when you therefore begin to live it, guess what is going to happen? The Spirit of God is going to help you put to death the deeds of the body. That is how it works.

And, finally, we need to learn what it means to watch and pray. Jesus gave this very command to his disciples, you will recall, in Mathew chapter 26 verse 38. You will remember the context. Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane and he stations Peter, James and John in a particular place and he says to them.

“My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.”<sup>31</sup>

And then we read that he went on beyond them to a place of solitude had fell on his face and he prayed that the Father would spare him of drinking the bitter cup of divine wrath. And it is interesting in that whole passage we read that three times he returned to his disciples, three times he goes back to them only to find them asleep. They were utterly indifferent, unconcerned about not only what the Lord said, but why he said it which was to remind them of their own vulnerability to temptation.

In verse 41 Jesus therefore warned them. It says that they were to:

“Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”<sup>32</sup>

In essence, what he was warning them is keep alert. Stand guard over the frailties of your own flesh. Don't you see it? Especially given all of the satanic temptations that they were about to experience, the testing of their faith that would cause them to cower and fear and spiritual compromise. He was basically saying, “Don't be over confident in your own strength. Don't let down your guard. Remain alert with respect to those spiritual attacks from without and from the weakness within.”

Remember, Jesus taught us to pray to the Father that he would lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Scripture gives many illustrations of what it means

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<sup>31</sup> Matthew 26:38.

<sup>32</sup> Matthew 26:41.



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to watch and pray, especially when it comes to those times, those seasons in life when we are vulnerable when defeat could be right around the corner if we are not careful.

Remember Adam and Eve were deceived by the serpent. They rebelled against God during a season of Edenic splendor and intimate fellowship with the Lord.

Abraham was a man of great wealth and promise and yet during a season of waiting upon the Lord, he grew impatient, took matters into his own hands and succumbed to his wife's wicked scheme of having a child by Hagar and the consequences were absolutely devastating. And we continue to experience them today.

Remember that during a season of prolonged stress Moses succumbed to anger and smote the rock at Meribah. And remember David succumbed to his lust and sinned with Bathsheba during a season of complacency and spiritual over confidence. In a season of great spiritual victory you will recall how Elijah melted in absolute fear became suicidal because of the threats of Jezebel.

And during a season of discipleship and service, intimate fellowship with the Lord, Peter became overconfident and he boasted about his unwavering allegiance to Jesus and then he denied him three times.

Beloved, we need to be careful. We need to learn what it means to watch and pray. We need to anticipate those unique temptations that can surface in our lives unexpectedly during some season of vulnerability that we may not even be thinking about. But when we go to the Lord and say, "Lord, help me to see these things because I am so blinded by my sin at times. I am so deceived by my flesh. Oh, Spirit of God be merciful to me. Show me my sin. Help me to see those areas of temptation that I could walk into. Deliver me from those things."

So, my friends, if you are going to put to death the deeds of the body, you need to understand who you are in Christ, you need to search your heart, you need to go to war against sin, walk by the Spirit and crave the Word and, finally, learn what it means to watch and to pray. These are the kinds of things that the Spirit will use in your life to help you put to death those deeds of the body that bring such destruction to you and such dishonor to the Lord.

Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you for these truths. Thank you for the clarity of them. But, oh, God, we need you power to live them out. So we cry out in that regard that your Spirit would help us to live consistently with who we are in Christ. And for those who do not know you, oh Lord, how we beg you to overwhelm them with the wretchedness of their sin and the direction that their life is headed that today they would repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. May today be the day that they experience the miracle of the*

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*new birth. We ask all of these things for the sake of Jesus our glorious Redeemer, the one that we long to see. Amen.*

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